

HOW BUSINESS EVENTS POWER THE UK'S INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

THE ROLE OF BUSINESS EVENTS IN THE UK'S INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

A briefing from the
Events Industry Alliance





Created by ESSA, AEV and AEO,
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FOREWORD

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy identifies eight sectors with the greatest potential to drive economic growth: advanced manufacturing, clean energy, creative industries, defence, digital and technologies, financial services, life sciences, and professional and business services.

Identifying the right sectors is an important first step. But growth does not happen simply because a sector has been prioritised. Businesses need customers, investment, skilled people, strong supply chains and access to international markets. They need opportunities to test ideas, showcase products, build relationships and turn ambition into commercial activity.

Business events provide those opportunities. Through trade shows, exhibitions and conferences, business events bring together the companies, buyers, investors, researchers and decision-makers who drive growth across the economy. Businesses invest heavily to attend because these events give them direct

access to the people and organisations that help them sell, invest, innovate and expand. In an increasingly digital world, they remain one of the most effective ways to build trust, forge partnerships and create new commercial opportunities.

The sector already contributes £33.6 billion to the UK economy each year and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs. But its greatest value lies beyond its own economic footprint. Business events help other industries grow. They accelerate the spread of new technologies, connect British firms with international customers, strengthen supply chains and attract investment into regional economies.



“

WITH THE RIGHT RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT, THE UK CAN STRENGTHEN ITS POSITION AS A GLOBAL DESTINATION FOR TRADE, INVESTMENT AND INNOVATION”

Yet despite this role, business events have often been viewed primarily through the lens of the visitor economy. This overlooks their wider economic importance. They are not simply gatherings that generate spending in hotels, restaurants and transport, important though that contribution is. They are commercial marketplaces and part of the infrastructure that enables growth across the wider economy.

Government already recognises that some industries are important because they support the success of others. Business events should be viewed in the same way.

This briefing makes that case. It shows how business events support each of the

Industrial Strategy's eight priority sectors and demonstrates the role they play in driving trade, investment, innovation and regional growth. It also sets out a series of practical, cost-free reforms that would enable the sector to make an even greater contribution, including a dedicated business events strategy, clear departmental ownership and a more structured approach to ministerial engagement.

With the right recognition and support, the UK can strengthen its position as a global destination for trade, investment and innovation, giving businesses of every size better opportunities to grow, compete and succeed.



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BUSINESS EVENTS: A FOUNDATIONAL INDUSTRY

The Industrial Strategy identifies the sectors that can drive future growth. Business events provide the connections and commercial infrastructure those sectors need to deliver it.

No sector grows in isolation. Businesses need to find customers, secure investment, adopt new technology, build supply chains, recruit skilled people and enter new markets. These things depend on relationships between firms, investors, researchers, government and international partners.

Business events bring those groups together at scale.

They create concentrated marketplaces in which products are launched, contracts are discussed, technologies are demonstrated and investment decisions are made. They allow a manufacturer to compare new machinery, a technology company to meet prospective customers, a defence supplier to enter a global supply chain or a growing British firm to reach international buyers.

This is why their contribution cannot be measured only through venue spending or visitor numbers. Their wider value lies in the economic activity they enable before, during and after an event.

Ports connect goods with markets. Transport networks connect people with jobs. Energy systems give businesses the power they need to operate. In a similar way, business events connect companies with the customers, ideas, capital and partners they need to grow.



HOW BUSINESS EVENTS SUPPORT THE INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

1. THEY ACCELERATE INNOVATION

A central aim of the Industrial Strategy is to raise productivity by increasing the adoption of innovation and new technologies. Business events allow firms to see new products in operation, compare solutions, learn from their peers and meet the researchers and suppliers developing the next generation of technology. This helps ideas and technologies move more quickly between organisations and through supply chains.

This role is becoming more important as artificial intelligence changes the way organisations operate. Digital tools can automate processes and make connections, but they cannot fully reproduce the trust and shared understanding created through sustained face-to-face contact. Many of the partnerships and investments that support innovation begin with direct interaction.

2. THEY TURN INNOVATION INTO INVESTMENT AND GROWTH

The Industrial Strategy aims to make the UK the best place to start, scale and grow a business. That requires functioning marketplaces in which firms can find customers, secure capital and build commercial partnerships.

Business events provide those marketplaces. They connect companies with buyers, investors, suppliers and international partners. This gives firms a route to win contracts, attract investment and find new opportunities for growth.

3. THEY STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The UK is competing with other countries to attract investment, build global companies and secure a greater share of international trade. Major events bring overseas buyers, investors, government delegations and industry leaders into the UK. This gives British firms the chance to demonstrate their products without having to establish an immediate presence in every target market. It also allows the UK to showcase its industrial strengths to an international audience.

4. THEY STRENGTHEN SUPPLY CHAINS

The growth of the eight priority sectors depends on the strength of the businesses beneath their largest and most visible companies. Business events bring major firms together with smaller suppliers, new entrants and specialist providers. They allow SMEs to demonstrate their capabilities, understand what larger businesses need and enter relationships that would be difficult to form through traditional procurement routes alone. This spreads opportunity beyond major firms and helps industrial growth reach the regions and communities where supply chains are based.

5. THEY SUPPORT SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Economic growth depends on businesses having access to skilled people and workers having opportunities to learn throughout their careers. Conferences and exhibitions allow professionals to see new technology, understand changes in their market and learn directly from industry leaders and peers. They also connect employers with prospective workers and give individuals a clearer view of the skills their sector will need in future. This helps firms adopt new practices and build the workforce needed for long-term growth.

6. THEY SUPPORT REGIONAL GROWTH

The Industrial Strategy places regions, city regions and industrial clusters at the heart of national growth. Business events can strengthen these clusters by concentrating economic and commercial activity in places with existing sector strengths. They attract businesses, buyers and investors into regional economies and raise the national and international profile of local industries. Major venues also generate direct spending in hotels, restaurants, transport and local supply chains. But their regional impact is wider than visitor spending. By bringing an industry together in a particular place, an event can help that place become more visible as a centre for investment, innovation and expertise.



THE SECTOR'S IMPACT ACROSS THE UK

SCOTLAND

VENUE: EICC (Edinburgh International Conference Centre)

EVENT: Turing Fest

IS-8 SECTOR: Digital and technologies

VENUE: Scottish Event Campus

EVENT: All-Energy + Dcarbonise

IS-8 SECTOR: Clean energy

NORTH WEST

VENUE: Liverpool Experience Campus (ACC Liverpool)

EVENT: ACT Annual Conference

IS-8 SECTOR: Financial services

VENUE: Manchester Central

EVENT: DTX Manchester

IS-8 SECTOR: Digital and technologies

NORTH EAST

VENUE: Utilita Arena Newcastle

EVENT: Manufacturing & Engineering North East

IS-8 SECTOR: Advanced manufacturing

YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER

VENUE: Harrogate Convention Centre

EVENT: ASPIH Conference 2026

IS-8 SECTOR: Life sciences

VENUE: Royal Armouries Leeds

EVENT: UKREiIF

IS-8 SECTOR: Professional and business services

NORTHERN IRELAND

VENUE: ICC Belfast

EVENT: UK Space Conference

IS-8 SECTOR: Advanced manufacturing

WEST MIDLANDS

VENUE: National Exhibition Centre (NEC)

EVENT: MACH

IS-8 SECTOR: Advanced manufacturing

EAST MIDLANDS

VENUE: Silverstone International Conference and Exhibition Centre

EVENT: CTS - The Motorsport Engineering and Technology Show

IS-8 SECTOR: Advanced manufacturing

EAST OF ENGLAND

VENUE: UTAC Millbrook

EVENT: Cenex Expo

IS-8 SECTOR: Advanced manufacturing

WALES

VENUE: ICC Wales

EVENT: Wales Manufacturing & Supply Chain Conference & Exhibition

IS-8 SECTOR: Advanced manufacturing

LONDON

VENUE: Excel London

EVENT: DSEI

IS-8 SECTOR: Defence

SOUTH WEST

VENUE: Bournemouth International Centre

EVENT: iHV Evidence-based Practice Conference

IS-8 SECTOR: Life sciences

SOUTH EAST

VENUE: Farnborough International Exhibition and Conference Centre

EVENT: Farnborough International Airshow

IS-8 SECTOR: Defence

VENUE: The Brighton Centre

EVENT: BrightonSEO

IS-8 SECTOR: Digital and technologies

FROM STRATEGY TO COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Taken together, these functions show why business events should be treated as a foundational industry.

Their contribution is not confined to one part of the economy. The same basic model operates across advanced manufacturing, defence, technology, life sciences and the creative industries:

BUSINESS EVENTS BRING THE RIGHT ORGANISATIONS TOGETHER. THOSE CONNECTIONS LEAD TO TRADE, INVESTMENT, INNOVATION AND GROWTH.

The precise commercial outcomes differ between sectors. At MACH, manufacturers meet suppliers and make investment decisions. At Farnborough, aerospace and defence businesses secure orders across global supply chains. At Tech Show London, technology firms reach customers, investors and international partners. At Space-Comm Expo Europe, companies build the trusted relationships needed to compete for complex, long-term contracts.

These events are different in scale and character, but they perform the same foundational role. They create the conditions in which the government's priority sectors can grow.

The sector case studies that follow show that role in practice.



HOW BUSINESS EVENTS SUPPORT THE IS-8 SECTORS

The Industrial Strategy identifies eight sectors with the capacity to generate faster growth, higher productivity and stronger regional economies.

Each sector faces its own commercial challenges. Advanced manufacturers need to spread new technologies through complex supply chains. Technology companies need access to customers and international markets. Defence firms need trusted, long-term relationships with buyers and partners. Creative businesses need visibility, audiences and routes to investment.

Business events respond to those different needs through the same basic function, bringing together the people and organisations required to turn economic potential into commercial activity.

The following case studies should therefore not be read simply as descriptions of successful events. Each one demonstrates how the business events sector supports a wider Industrial Strategy objective.

ACROSS THE CASE STUDIES, BUSINESS EVENTS:

- ✓ Bring new products and technologies to market;
- ✓ Help British businesses secure customers and contracts;
- ✓ Connect smaller firms with major buyers and supply chains;
- ✓ Attract international investment and commercial activity to the UK;
- ✓ Strengthen regional clusters and centres of expertise; and
- ✓ Give government direct access to strategically important industries.



KEY EVENTS FOR 2027 AND BEYOND

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
Space-Comm Expo 24 - 25 Feb 2027 • London • Excel London	5,000
MACH 3 - 7 April 2028 • Birmingham • The NEC	26,000
The Commercial Vehicle Show 20-22 April 2027 • Birmingham • The NEC	11,000
Futurebuild 11-13 May 2027 • LondonExcel • London	9,000
UK Construction Week 11-12 May 2027 • London Excel • London	5,500
Smart Manufacturing Week 9-10 June 2027 • Birmingham • The NEC	8,600
Vehicle Electrification Show TBC • Birmingham • The NEC	4,500
Euro Bus Expo TBC • Birmingham • The NEC	8,000
MOVE TBC • Birmingham • The NEC	2,700

CLEAN ENERGY

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
Solar & Storage Live UK 13-14 April 2027 • Birmingham • The NEC	25,000
All-Energy + Dcarbonise 12-13 May 2027 • Glasgow Scottish • Event Campus	13,000
SPE Offshore Europe 7-9 September 2027 • Aberdeen • P&J Live	25,000
Reset Connect (London Climate Action Week) TBC • LondonExcel • London	3,000

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
Spring Fair 7-10 February 2027 • Birmingham • The NEC	17,000
The London Book Fair 16-18 March 2027 • London Excel • London	48,500
SXSW London TBC • London • Shoreditch	20,000
Advertising Week Europe TBC • London • 180 Studios	7,000

DEFENCE

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
DSEI 7-10 September 2027 • London Excel • London	40,000
Farnborough International Airshow 2028 • Farnborough • Farnborough International	100,000

DIGITAL AND TECH

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
BETT Show 20-22 January 2027 • LondonExcel • London	35,000
Digital Transformation Week 3-4 February 2027 • London • Olympia	7,000
Tech Show London (co-located with Data Centre World and Cloud Expo Europe) 10 - 11 March 2027 • London • Excel London	23,000
DTX London 10-11 March 2027 • London • Excel London	8,000
Retail Technology Show 21-22 April 2027 • London • Excel London	9,000
DTX Manchester 28-29 April 2027 • Manchester • Manchester Central	6,500
London Tech Week 7-11 June 2027 • London • Olympia	27,000
Ecommerce Expo (with Technology for Marketing) TBC • London • Excel London	12,000
Subsea Expo TBC • Aberdeen • P&J Live	4,500

FINANCIAL SERVICES

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
UK Fintech Week (Innovate Finance) TBC • London • Various	1,500

LIFE SCIENCES

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
London Vet Show 11-12 March 2027 • London Excel • London	5,000
Med-Tech Innovation Expo 29 April 2027 • Birmingham • The NEC	4,800

PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS SERVICES

VENUE & DETAILS	EST. ATT
UKREiiF 18-20 May 2027 • Leeds • Royal Armouries	16,000
Brand Licensing Europe 28-30 September 2027 • London • Excel London	2,500
World Travel Market 3-5 November 2027 • London • Excel London	45,000
London Build Expo TBC • London • Excel London	35,000

SECTOR FOCUS

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

HOW BUSINESS EVENTS SUPPORT THIS SECTOR

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY ROLE	Spreading innovation through supply chains, supporting investment in new equipment and connecting British manufacturers with domestic and international buyers.
BUSINESS NEED	Manufacturers need to adopt new technology, invest in equipment and build stronger supplier relationships.
ROLE OF EVENTS	Large-scale exhibitions let firms see machinery in operation, compare technologies and meet suppliers and buyers.
COMMERCIAL EVIDENCE	MACH accounts for £200 million of business over five days.
WIDER UK VALUE	Productivity, export growth, regional jobs and stronger manufacturing supply chains.

Advanced manufacturing contributes more than £82 billion in GVA and supports around 760,000 jobs. With 84% of manufacturing jobs based outside London and the South East, its success is central to the government's regional growth ambitions.

Turning the UK's manufacturing strengths into higher productivity requires firms across the supply chain to adopt new technology, invest in equipment and form stronger commercial relationships. Large-scale manufacturing events provide the marketplace where much of this happens.

MACH, the UK's largest exhibition for advanced manufacturing, brings engineers, manufacturers, buyers, suppliers and technology providers together in one place. It gives businesses the opportunity to see machinery in operation, compare technologies, meet prospective suppliers and make investment decisions.

The case studies below show how business events turn manufacturing innovation into orders, investment and supply-chain growth.

KEY EVENTS IN ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

 25,442 ATTENDEES 18,124 TRADE VISITORS 23,646m² OF SPACE OCCUPIED BIRMINGHAM	 550 EXHIBITORS 10,130 VISITORS FARNBOROUGH	 391 EXHIBITORS 8,699 VISITORS BIRMINGHAM
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MACH

MACH is a biennial event owned by the Manufacturing Technologies Association, bringing together UK manufacturing engineers, decision-makers, buyers and suppliers.

It typically attracts around 26,000 total attendees, including 18,124 trade visitors, with a peak daily attendance of 6,414. A significant amount of business takes place between exhibitors across the sector's supply chain. The show accounts for £200 million of business over five days, equivalent to 10% of all sales in the sector.

This is concentrated commercial activity in a sector the government is actively trying to grow. Manufacturers use events like MACH to compare technologies, strengthen supplier networks and make investment decisions. Smaller firms gain access to customers, larger firms and innovation centres that would otherwise take months to reach. The event therefore acts as a route for spreading innovation through the supply chain, particularly among SMEs.

“

MACH 2026 has been a great show for us. The volume of visitors and, more importantly, the quality of those visitors has been exceptional throughout the week. This year's exhibition has taken things to the next level in terms of the industries that have visited our stand. The quality of engagement with those businesses, alongside the clear intent to invest, whether immediately or in the future, has been particularly encouraging.”

Mazak
YAMAZAKI MAZAK CORPORATION

Yamazaki Mazak is a machine tool manufacturer based in Japan with factories around the world, including its European headquarters in Worcester. The company's UK arm employs almost 700 people



FARNBOROUGH INTERNATIONAL AIRSHOW

Farnborough International Airshow is the world's most international civil and defence aerospace exhibition, held every two years at Farnborough Airport in Hampshire and alternating with the Paris Air Show. Over a week in July, it brings together major airframe and engine manufacturers, thousands of supply-chain exhibitors, government delegations and military procurement teams from across the globe.

The 2026 edition was the largest in the show's 78-year history. Exhibition space sold out more than twelve months before opening, a sixth hall was added to absorb the overflow, and more than 60% of exhibitors came from outside the UK. Across five days it drew 141,580 trade and public visitors from 136 countries, up 41% on 2024 and close to double the 2022 figure. For one week, a single site in

South East England is where the global aerospace, defence and space industries do business, and Britain is the host rather than a visiting delegation.

Farnborough covers several sectors at once, and it shows how trade actually gets done. Exports in advanced manufacturing and defence do not happen despite the exhibition halls. They happen in them.

IN NUMBERS



It is a crucial moment in the calendar for some of the UK's biggest companies, including Rolls-Royce, which has a presence across 37 UK sites and more than 1,350 British suppliers. It manufactures in the UK and sells to the world. Approximately 80% of its UK output goes overseas, accounting for £1 in every £50 of all UK goods exported, and the company puts its total contribution to the UK economy at almost £12 billion.

Over the first four trade days of the 2026 show, Airbus, Boeing and Embraer secured 353 firm aircraft orders, while CFM International, Pratt & Whitney and GE Aerospace secured 904 firm

engine orders, together with 10 firm helicopter orders. ADS put the combined value of deals announced over that period at £62.9 billion, with an estimated £10.8 billion flowing into UK industry, reflecting Britain's role in components such as wings, engines, landing gear and avionics.

This is what business events deliver in practice, a fixed point in the calendar where the world's buyers and Britain's supply chain are in the same room, and where a single week's trading translates directly into sustained UK employment in manufacturing and engineering.

SECTOR FOCUS

DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGIES

HOW BUSINESS EVENTS SUPPORT THIS SECTOR

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY ROLE	Helping technology businesses commercialise products, find customers, secure partnerships and reach international markets.
BUSINESS NEED	Technology firms need routes to customers, investors, partners and overseas buyers.
ROLE OF EVENTS	Events let businesses demonstrate products and build commercial relationships at scale.
COMMERCIAL EVIDENCE	Tech Show London exhibitors expect to generate an average of £450,000 in business within 12 months.
WIDER UK VALUE	Export growth, inward investment and a stronger UK technology ecosystem.

Digital and technology businesses need more than strong ideas. They need routes to customers, investors, partners and international buyers.

Business events give firms direct access to those audiences at scale. They allow businesses to demonstrate new products, develop commercial relationships and build the international connections needed for export growth.

Tech Show London shows what this looks like in practice. It is the UK's biggest B2B technology expo and conference, bringing together five events under one ticket: Cloud & AI Infrastructure, DevOps Live, Cloud & Cyber Security Expo, Big Data & AI World, and Data Centre World.

Exhibitors report an average of 123 connections during the event and expect to generate £450,000 in business within 12 months. Visitors expect to spend an average of £175,000 with the partners and exhibitors they meet on site. These are not simply attendance figures. They show how an event creates a market around an industry the government wants to grow.

The show also has a strong international dimension. Tech Show London attracts 19,000 attendees, including 3,000 international participants, and in 2025 hosted 440 exhibitors, 237 of them international. That reach creates opportunities for export growth, inward investment and cross-border partnerships.

Tech Show London is one part of a wider digital events ecosystem that also includes London Tech Week 2025, with 146 exhibitors and 26,855 visits; Infosecurity 2025, with 270 exhibitors and 40,000 visits; and Connected Britain, with 243 exhibitors and 6,272 visits.

Together, these events help firms sell, scale and export, and help the UK tell its technology story internationally. That matters because competing countries increasingly treat flagship technology events as economic assets and support them accordingly.

Government participation adds weight to the UK's offer, helps international investors and delegations understand the country's strengths and gives ministers direct access to firms working at the edge of technological change.

“

We connect with our target audience and we exceed our goals every year. That's why we keep coming back. Whether you're already an established vendor or a new vendor, this is the show to be at in the UK. And also, internationally. We go to all of the global events as well.”



Schneider Electric specialises in energy technology. Its UK operations are headquartered in Telford, with sites in London, Leeds and Scarborough.

SECTOR FOCUS

DEFENCE

HOW BUSINESS EVENTS SUPPORT THIS SECTOR

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY ROLE	Building trusted relationships, strengthening strategic supply chains and connecting British firms with international buyers and partners.
BUSINESS NEED	Defence and space firms need repeated access to buyers, agencies, major contractors and international partners.
ROLE OF EVENTS	Events provide a stable place to build trust and position firms within complex supply chains.
COMMERCIAL EVIDENCE	Space-Comm Expo Europe facilitated more than 300 curated meetings and a delegation programme involving 89 companies.
WIDER UK VALUE	National security, exports, regional industrial clusters and long-term investment.

Defence contributes an estimated £15 billion in GVA and supports around 182,000 direct jobs, with a further sizeable workforce sustained indirectly through supply chains. The industrial base is concentrated in regional clusters, from Barrow-in-Furness to Belfast, making it an important driver of place-based growth as well as national security.

Defence and space rely on complex supply chains and relationships built over long periods.

Contracts are rarely secured through a single transaction. Firms need repeated access to buyers, government agencies, major contractors and international partners.

Business events provide a stable point at which those relationships can be developed. Space-Comm Expo Europe brings together defence companies, space technology businesses, agencies, government officials and buyers from across Europe and the wider world.

KEY EVENTS IN DEFENCE



1,793
EXHIBITORS

46,962
VISITORS

LONDON



214
EXHIBITORS

8,005
ATTENDEES

81%
REBOOK RATE

£427,000
AVERAGE EXPECTED ORDER
VALUE PER EXHIBITOR

LONDON



MORE THAN
300
CURATED MEETINGS

89
COMPANIES IN VIP
DELEGATIONS

50
COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

LONDON

“

As one of the largest defence primes, we are finding this an excellent opportunity to showcase our capabilities, what our business does and, of course, to meet colleagues and develop business. It really is an excellent event.”



Babcock

BABCOCK, ON SPACE-COMM EXPO

Babcock is a leading British aerospace, defence and nuclear engineering company that exports internationally. While headquartered in London, it has sites around the UK, including Bristol, Plymouth, Northern Ireland and Wales.



SPACE-COMM EXPO EUROPE

Space-Comm Expo Europe is an annual space event that helps companies get their technology in front of buyers and suppliers across space and the wider defence sector.

A recent edition facilitated more than 300 curated meetings, alongside a delegation programme involving 89 companies, designed to connect exhibitors directly with decision-makers and buyers. International participation increased from 25 countries in 2025 to 50 in 2026, reflecting growing global competition and the importance of maintaining strong UK representation in internationally contested markets.

The event also raises the government's profile with the sector. Over the past six years, more than £1 billion in public funding has been announced at the show, including £500 million announced in 2026.

Beyond immediate transactions, its value lies in long-term positioning. Defence and space contracts are rarely secured instantly and rely on trust built through repeated interaction. Space-Comm Expo is where UK firms build those relationships with international agencies, buyers and partners over time.

In sectors where trust matters most, business events such as Space-Comm Expo Europe function as vital commercial and strategic infrastructure.

Ministerial attendance is particularly important in defence and space, where government presence can attract international delegations, demonstrate political commitment and strengthen the position of British firms in global markets.



DREAMHACK BIRMINGHAM

DreamHack Birmingham demonstrates how business events can help accelerate growth in the creative industries, one of the eight priority sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy.

In September 2025, ESL FACEIT Group announced that DreamHack Birmingham and ESL One Birmingham would come to the NEC and bp pulse LIVE in March 2026. It marked the first time in DreamHack's 20-plus year history that the festival had been held in the UK, bringing one of the world's largest gaming and digital culture brands to Britain.

The decision to bring DreamHack to Birmingham was not simply about staging an event. It was a vote of confidence in the UK's gaming and esports ecosystem and the West Midlands' ambitions to become a leading hub for digital and creative industries. Announcing the event, West Midlands Mayor Richard Parker highlighted esports as one of the fastest-growing parts of the economy and pointed to the region's growing concentration of gaming talent, universities and studios.

Across three days, DreamHack brought together esports tournaments, games developers, technology brands, creators, cosplay, live entertainment and gaming communities under one roof. Running alongside it was ESL One Birmingham, one of the world's most prestigious Dota 2 tournaments, featuring 16 of the world's leading teams competing for a \$1 million prize pool.

The festival therefore acted as more than an entertainment event. It provided a platform where developers, publishers, brands, creators and audiences could connect, showcase products, build partnerships and strengthen international networks.

The scale of the opportunity is significant. The UK esports market was forecast to generate revenues of \$250.7 million in 2025, while the UK is home to almost 40 million gamers. DreamHack's global festivals attract more than 200,000 visitors and reach tens of millions more online each year. By securing one of the sector's most recognised global brands, Birmingham positioned itself at the centre of a fast-growing international industry and demonstrated how business events can support the growth of a priority Industrial Strategy sector.

Like many creative businesses, games studios and esports organisations depend on visibility, networks and access to new audiences. Business events provide a platform where developers, publishers, investors, creators and consumers can come together in one place. In doing so, they help businesses grow, strengthen international connections and create new commercial opportunities.



Government and mayoral support can help major international events choose the UK, strengthen their profile abroad and connect them to wider plans for regional growth and investment.

IN NUMBERS

50,000

ATTENDEES EXPECTED AT THE
INAUGURAL UK EDITION OF
DREAMHACK BIRMINGHAM

200,000+

VISITORS ATTEND
DREAMHACK FESTIVALS
GLOBALLY EACH YEAR

40M

GAMERS ACROSS
THE UK

£258m

REVENUE PROJECTED FOR UK
ESPORTS MARKET BY 2030

\$1.7m

(£1.3 MILLION) COMBINED
ESPORTS PRIZE POOL ACROSS
DREAMHACK BIRMINGHAM AND
ESL ONE BIRMINGHAM

16

OF THE WORLD'S BEST DOTA
2 TEAMS COMPETING AT ESL
ONE BIRMINGHAM

18,000

FANS ATTENDED THE FINAL
THREE DAYS OF ESL ONE
BIRMINGHAM IN 2025

327,000+

PEAK ONLINE VIEWERS FOR
ESL ONE BIRMINGHAM



ONE SECTOR SUPPORTING EIGHT OTHERS

The examples in this briefing cover different industries, locations and types of event. But they point to the same conclusion.

Business events give companies access to customers, investment, technology, skills and international markets. They provide the environments in which supply chains are strengthened, products are commercialised and long-term partnerships are formed.

This is why their importance cannot be understood through the lens of tourism alone. Their direct economic contribution matters, but so does the growth they enable elsewhere.

The government has identified eight sectors on which the UK's future prosperity will depend. It should now recognise and support the commercial infrastructure that helps those sectors succeed.



WHAT OUR SECTOR NEEDS TO BUILD ON THIS SUCCESS

In July 2026, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee concluded its inquiry into Major Events, making several recommendations for how the UK government can better support the business events sector. The inquiry, led by Dame Caroline Dinenage, was launched in July 2025 to examine the challenges faced by the industry and consider how the sector can tap into new opportunities for growth.

The Committee found that, despite generating £33.6 billion a year, the sector is not consistently recognised within government, and that its growth is held back by the absence of a clear national strategy, coordinated leadership and sustained funding. It concluded that business events need to be seen as a distinct, trade-driven sector, and that their continued positioning within tourism policy risks limiting their impact and competitiveness.

Three of the Committee's recommendations matter most for the changes we are asking government to make.

A DEDICATED BUSINESS EVENTS STRATEGY

The Committee recommended that government develop and publish a standalone, long-term national business events strategy aligned with the Industrial Strategy, with a clear statement of government's ambition at its centre and supported by a sector-led National Business Events Council. It noted that Ireland and Germany have each launched 2030 roadmaps for their business events sectors, setting out the engagement, funding and direction the UK currently lacks. A strategy owned by government and explicitly linked to the eight growth-driving sectors would help unlock the sector's potential.

DEPARTMENTAL OWNERSHIP

The Committee recommended that government treat business events as a standalone priority and transfer responsibility to the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, supported by a cross-government structure with dedicated representation, a clear strategy and sustained funding. Responsibility for a trade-driven sector that supports export growth, inward investment and the commercialisation of innovation should sit with the department whose objectives it directly serves.

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO MINISTERIAL ATTENDANCE

The Committee identified ministerial engagement as a key determinant of success, but found that organisers frequently struggle to secure attendance in good time. The sector's evidence to the Committee was that early confirmation from a minister, or the Prime Minister, has a decisive effect because it allows organisers to secure the international ministerial delegations that follow.

The Committee recommended that government establish clear expectations for ministerial engagement, including indicative targets for attendance at priority events, published alongside regular reporting on attendance. Priority should rest on the trade, investment and innovation value of an event, not on delegate numbers alone.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

These recommendations follow directly from the evidence set out in this briefing. If business events are part of the infrastructure through which the Industrial Strategy is delivered, government should treat them accordingly.

A dedicated strategy would set a clear direction. Departmental ownership would place responsibility with the part of government focused on business growth, trade and investment. A structured approach to ministerial attendance would help the UK compete for international events, attract overseas delegations and give British firms greater access to global decision-makers.

None of these changes requires government to subsidise the sector. They require government to recognise its economic role and organise itself around the opportunity.

